

Skills shortages in the UK economy

Autumn 2024

Foreword

By Lord Aberdare

Every challenge the new Government has set out to address is dependent on a population equipped with the right skills, now and in the future: from house-building to achieving net-zero targets; from reducing our reliance on migrant workers to enhancing productivity; from upgrading our transport infrastructure to delivering first-rate, accessible healthcare. Unless we get a grip on the unresponsiveness of our current education and skills system, to equip future generations with the essential and technical skills we will need, the success of these missions will be compromised.



This unresponsiveness is felt at all levels, not just in political circles. Findings from the latest Youth Voice Census, presented in this latest Skills Shortages Bulletin, highlight that just 10% of young people believe they will be able access quality work where they live (down 2.4% from 2023).

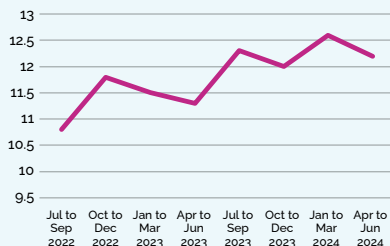
We are not creating the opportunities fast enough. Apprenticeships – a vital part of delivering better skills outcomes for the wider economy – have seen a disappointing decline in recent years from more than 509,000 in 2015-16 to about 337,000 in 2022-23, and the number of apprenticeships for young people and at entry-level has declined even more steeply. The Edge Foundation's recent [*Flex Without Compromise*](#) report has presented some helpful options for Government to redress that balance through the Growth and Skills Levy.

This Bulletin, however, is not just a reflection of the difficulties. It also offers insight into innovative interventions born out of necessity. From efforts to diversify the construction industry through early work experience opportunities, to pioneering training programmes in the renewable energy sector, these case studies serve as vital examples of how we might begin to address our most pressing skills shortages and point the way towards a coherent and comprehensive strategy for tackling skills needs.

In this pivotal moment, with fresh political will and the promise of a new, collaborative body to unify the skills landscape and intensify training, the need for coordinated action, robust investment, and imaginative solutions is great. As we navigate the complexities of the twenty-first century, this bulletin offers both a sobering assessment of the current state of our nation's skills needs, and an inspiring look at some possible solutions.

Skills Shortages Data Dashboard

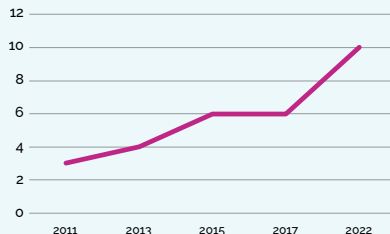
Percentage of all 16 to 24 year olds who are NEET



872,000

of 16-24-year-olds were not in education, employment or training (NEET) up from 798,000 in April to June 2023 ([ONS](#))

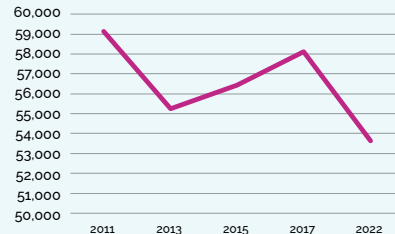
Percentage of establishments with at least one skill-shortage vacancy



10%

of businesses have at least one skills shortage vacancy ([DfE](#))

Total investment through all training, adjusted for 2022 prices



9%

drop in investment training since 2011 ([DfE](#))

68%

of organisations with skills shortages acknowledge this increases workload on existing staff ([Open University](#))

13% of workers in 2023 had 'substantial' essential employment skills (EES) deficiencies ([NFER](#)). The six EES are: communication, collaboration, problem-solving, organising, planning and prioritising work, creative thinking and information literacy



Government spending on skills in England will be **£1 billion** lower by 2025 than in 2010 ([Learning & Work Institute](#))



Just 10% of young people believe quality work is available where they live ([Youth Employment UK](#))



The number of workers in England with 'substantial' essential employment skills deficiencies may grow from 3.7 million workers in 2023 up to **7 million** workers in 2035 ([NFER](#))

88%

of the public think that education should focus more on teaching young people skills that will be useful for the workplace ([Edge Foundation](#))

Two-thirds of young people (66%) want to see greater action from the Government to help young people get into work ([Youth Futures Foundation](#))

12 million people in England work in occupations that are projected to decline between now and 2035 ([NFER](#))

Only 36%

of young people in secondary school think they understand the skills employers are looking for ([Youth Employment UK](#))

The cost of low essential skills (listening, speaking, problem solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership and teamwork) to the UK economy was estimated to be **£22 billion** in 2022 ([Skills Builder](#))

Key Highlights from the Bulletin

Since the last Skills Shortage Bulletin, the UK elected a new Labour Government, coming to power with the ambition to 'kickstart economic growth' and 'break down barriers to opportunity'. In this spirit, contributions to this bulletin are animated by the possibility of reform and action – but the scale of the challenges we face remains hard to ignore.

The Association of Colleges highlights how the Labour Government, through its new body Skills England, might be able to work in partnership with the sector to better deliver on the government's central missions through local skills planning or reform to the Apprenticeship Levy. The Edge Foundation, similarly concerned with current declines in apprenticeship starts for young people, introduce our recent report on how to increase the flexibility of the levy for employers whilst improving its capacity to help deliver government priorities regarding young people and SMEs.

Leadership and investment is required immediately. A dynamic skills system will be important to support and reskill workers in the one million jobs lost from declining occupations by 2035, as NFER argue. But Learning and Work Institute anticipate that while between 2021 and 2035 the proportion of the working age population qualified to a higher education level will rise by 5 ppts to 49%, another one third of working-age adults will still only be qualified at or below GCSE or equivalent level. The adult skills budget in England has been cut by £1 billion (20%) since 2010 – equal to a 32% cut in per head investment. This reduction has occurred despite a projected decline of 3.5 million jobs needing qualifications below A Level or equivalent and a rise of 6 million more jobs requiring higher education qualifications. Our overview of the state of education and training pathways into creative and cultural sector indicates how the unintended consequences of the introduction of the EBacc and Progress 8 measures in 2016 could potentially exercise profound limitations on the depth of the labour pool in one of the UK's fastest growing sectors.





The ongoing ossification of our current skills system also has immediate consequences. The Open University's Business Barometer has identified a welcome decrease in the number of businesses reporting skills shortages (62% down from 73%). However, there remains a lack of strategic planning to address this gap. This has consequences for staff morale and wellbeing, with 68% of employers reporting an increase in their employees' workload. These findings are corroborated by this year's Youth Voice Census from Youth Employment UK. 3 in 5 young people reported increases in stress and pressure this year, but just a quarter were offered promotional opportunities. Overall, just 10% of young people think they will be able access quality work where they live, down 2.4 ppt from 2023. Barriers particularly include limited travel options, and mental health. 34% of young people aged 18-24 reported symptoms that indicated they were experiencing a 'common mental disorder', the Resolution Foundation report.

We hear from several examples in this bulletin of what successful interventions to meet these challenges and address skills shortages might look like. The Crown Estate reflect on their pilot in East Anglia to 'train-the-trainer' and help them prepare local people to move into some of the 70,000 new jobs required by the offshore wind sector by 2030. Construction Youth Trust, in their 'Thinking Differently' project, are seeking to address the low diversity of the construction and built environment sector: despite being one of the largest sectors in the UK and employing 3.1 million people, employees from minority ethnic groups make up just 5.4% of the workforce and women only 11%. They evaluated providing young people with earlier work experience, peer networking and support opportunities, and more upfront information, including for example expected salaries from their start through to 10 years into their career.



The world is changing fast and education needs to keep up. Edge is an independent, politically impartial education foundation. We want education to be relevant to the twenty-first century. We gather evidence through research and real world projects and partnerships and use this to lead the debate and influence policy and practice.

Edge believes all young people need to be equipped with the skills that today's global, digital economy demands, through a broad and balanced curriculum, high quality training, engaging real world learning and rich relationships between education and employers.

Visit www.edge.co.uk to find out more.

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How to preserve apprenticeships for young people under a Growth and Skills Levy

Edge Foundation

Part of the role of Skills England will be to decide what courses will be funded under the incoming Growth and Skills Levy – the planned replacement of the Apprenticeship Levy designed to allow businesses to use a to-be-determined portion of the levy pot on other skills training. However, as we warn in our new report, *Flex Without Compromise*, unless the policy is carefully designed, this move could squeeze funding for apprenticeship opportunities – and the worrying decline of young people participating in apprenticeships, especially at lower levels, will continue.

The report also notes that the Growth and Skills Levy could risk compromising achievement of other government policies and missions: the Youth Guarantee (key to the Opportunity Mission) and the Growth Mission (as it's SMEs and industries integral to growth that are most likely to lose out).

Instead, we set out the levers left to pull in the apprenticeship system that would make a substantial

difference to employers' ability to use their levy and create more, lower-level opportunities for young people, before jumping to – or at least, in tandem with – flex of the levy. We must not forget that the apprenticeship system is there to serve young people as well as employers.

Moving forward with the Growth and Skills Levy, there are valuable lessons to learn from the design and implementation of the Apprenticeship Levy – including the need for clearly articulated purpose and clarity around the 'Treasury margin'. We also present a series of options available to the Government and Skills England in thinking about the proportions of the levy that can be spent on non-apprenticeship skills training and the scope of the training that should qualify for funding under the levy, that could help mitigate potential, unintended consequences of reform that would hinder, not promote, greater, high-quality vocational opportunities for young people.



but, crucially, places young people at the heart of apprenticeships policy

Professor Lord Richard Layard

This report from Edge presents the options at the government's disposal, with a pragmatic way forward that is sympathetic to the concerns of businesses, understanding of the need to boost employer investment in skills training,



The crucial role of Skills England in building a post 16 education and skills system in England

Lewis Cooper, Association of Colleges

In spring earlier this year (with a UK general election still imminent, widely predicted to occur in the autumn) I met with the special advisors to the Australian Minister for Skills. I was struck by the advisors' seemingly modest message, which underpinned the reform agenda they'd been undertaking in Australia's post-compulsory education and skills systems since they had come to power two years earlier. 'Above all', they said, 'we're working to build a system – we simply don't have one at the moment, and addressing that is at the heart of everything we're doing.'

The parallels with England in terms of that lack of a 'system' felt stark, and the challenges here are well rehearsed: no overarching post-16 strategy setting out the purpose or priorities which drive policymaking and institutional practices; limited coordination across the distinct parts of the system; distinct, often inequitable and at times conflicting approaches to funding and oversight; and limited oversight in terms of the ultimate outcomes that we want to have achieved. [The Independent Commission on the College of the Future report for England](#), published at the end of 2020, argued that this lack of a system is equally frustrating for education providers, for employers and for government, 'with the absence of coherent structures, through which they can come together with policy makers in government to agree skills and economic priorities.' Notably, the Commission highlighted that 'across hundreds of conversations over the past year, the Commission has heard this reflected as a profound lack of trust that permeates right across the system.'

Since that conversation back in May, we've had a general election of our own, and a focus on building a more coherent post 16 education and skills system is a clear part of our new government's agenda. Skills England will be a central element of this ambition – a body, sitting across government, which for me

should be focussed on three core functions: firstly informing priorities of the system; secondly, facilitating coordination across government, with Mayoral Combined Authorities, and between key agencies, in partnership with providers, unions and employers; and thirdly, reviewing the extent to which the agreed priorities are being delivered on.

What would look different if we got this right, and what would the impact be? And how does this help us to see what it means for us to lack a 'system' in England? Let's take three examples, of key policy interventions from recent years. First, to the Apprenticeship Levy. [London Economics](#) analysis commissioned by AoC and published this Spring has shown that since the introduction of the levy, we've seen a steep decline in apprenticeship starts for young people, a shift in apprenticeship starts from the most deprived parts of England to London and the South East, a decline in starts in sectors where skills challenges are most acute and a growth in management and leadership courses, and a decline in starts for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. This is a very significant policy failure, with far from optimal outcomes, whether we're looking at economic growth or wider priorities for fairness and opportunity.



If we get Skills England right, and with the shift towards a reform Growth and Skills Levy, use of the levy could be informed by a line of sight to our future skills needs, and any wider priorities we're keen to deliver on, such as regional inequalities and opportunities. This could enable employers, unions, providers, and both national and devolved governments to agree on priorities for investment, and through this making much more purposeful use of the over £2 billion resource we have available here. And Skills England would play a role in oversight here, too – raising a 'red flag' if there is a mismatch, as there has been for the past seven years, in where the levy is being used, and economic and social priorities which should guide this investment.

Secondly, let's look at the example of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) – a key policy in post 16 education and skills which the former Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, identified as one of three 'game changers' in the skills system at AoC annual conference last autumn, and were the central policy reform within the Skills Act 2022. These have been an important attempt at articulating local skills need, and strengthening the way in which employers and post 16 education providers work together. And despite many challenges, this has resulted in some important developments – both in supporting employers to think more rigorously about their long-term skills needs, in strengthening local partnerships including between colleges, and invariably in validating that the provision colleges are delivering reflects the needs of their localities.

However, as set out [in a recent AoC report](#), these local plans exist in a vacuum of any national plan or priorities – meaning that many local plans are both highly generic (describing trends and priorities which could be more sensibly set out once, nationally), and with little if any thought about how they might add up to a coherent whole. Do distinct local plans duplicate such that delivering on them all would rely on dramatic oversupply in some areas? Or conversely, do they sufficiently cover key skill priorities – do the LSIPs taken together offer what's needed to deliver the NHS workforce long-term plan, for example? And there's no oversight – who will be reviewing whether colleges and other providers are collectively delivering what the LSIPs identify, or exploring what these barriers to delivery might be?

Skills England can be key to bringing this all together – providing intelligence and setting priorities which elected Mayors, colleges and other providers, employers and unions then look at within their local/ regional context, to set out their own particularities and priorities, and using these local/ regional plans in turn to inform the national approach. With a focus on the whole post 16 system, they could review what is needed to ensure that colleges, universities and other providers are delivering on this coherently and efficiently, or whether there are gaps. And crucially, this would also involve setting out challenges in delivering on the national and local plans – including where funding in the system isn't sufficient to deliver on key areas.

The third example is much more general, and is about the approach we take to policy-making. Despite some notable progress in recent years, we have suffered from an environment for a long time of being a sector that is 'done to', rather than worked with, as partners. And whilst a general point, the impact this has on the sector's ability to deliver ultimately for people, employers and communities is immense. It means for example that we can introduce and seek to implement policy which doesn't reflect the realities 'on the ground', or the expertise of educators. It means that employers aren't clear about how they can engage with and access the system – unable to find the 'front door' – and so disengage and ultimately fail to invest in it. And it means that the relationship with unions is solely focussed on immediate industrial relations, and not exploring and agreeing the long-term priorities for the system, and for example how the workforce might have to change and evolve to deliver on this.

Bridget Phillipson has been clear since coming into government in her commitment to reforging a partnership with the sector. Skills England can and must be a key element of this - of rebuilding a system that is built upon social partnership, and a system which educators, employers and policy makers come together to grapple with the biggest challenges we face as a country, and set out the role our post 16 education and skills system can deliver on this government's central missions. The board appointments here will be critical of course, but so will the approach taken to its wider development, and the culture it builds, in working with partners across the sector, across government, and with elected Mayors too. And this partnership must invite an

ability for Skills England to work meaningfully at senior levels right across government, too.

Taken together, this is about bringing together and building on a raft of important policies and reforms which have taken place over recent years, all of the institutional expertise that exists on the ground, and the commitment and passion that exists for everyone across the system, across both policy makers, leaders and practitioners. It's the seemingly modest but fundamental task of rebuilding a system, and unlocking the potential for this system to play a much bigger role collectively, for people employers and communities.

Research Briefing: Skills England

The House of Commons Library published a Research Briefing on [Skills England](#) in October.

Skills England, established in shadow form in July 2024 within the Department for Education, will assume the responsibilities of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), with an extended mandate. Its primary role is to oversee skills development, identify gaps in workforce skills, and manage the accessibility of training opportunities through the forthcoming Growth and Skills Levy. The transition to Skills England is expected to take 9 to 12 months.

The core responsibilities of Skills England include collaborating with employers to develop, approve, and review occupational standards that are integral to apprenticeships, T Levels, and other technical qualifications. The organisation will also manage occupational maps, and ensure the quality and alignment of technical qualifications with occupational standards, and continue overseeing apprenticeship standards.

Beyond IfATE's previous scope, Skills England will actively assess skills gaps and future demands in collaboration with bodies such as the Industrial Strategy Council and the Migration Advisory Committee. A key aspect of its broader remit involves guiding the allocation of the Growth and Skills Levy, which will replace the Apprenticeship Levy. This new levy will allow employers to fund a wider range of training options beyond apprenticeships, enabling them to better address the specific skills required by their industries. Skills England will be responsible for determining which training will be eligible under the levy by evaluating market needs and consulting relevant stakeholders.

In September 2024, Skills England published two reports. The first, [Driving growth and widening opportunities](#), outlines the organisation's strategic role and its initial assessment of the UK's skills needs. It also highlights plans to refine these assessments in consultation with employers and other key organisations, ensuring that the Growth and Skills Levy meets labour market demands effectively. The second report introduced an [occupations in demand](#) index, ranking professions based on labour market indicators. It categorises occupations as being in critical demand, elevated demand, or not in high demand.

Business Barometer report 2024

The Open University

Closing the skills gap remains a priority for organisations across the UK. Set against the new UK Government's missions to 'kickstart economic growth' and 'break down barriers to opportunity', addressing this longstanding issue is high on the business and political agenda.

The Open University has released its annual Business Barometer report monitoring the current UK skills landscape, based on a survey of 1,350 UK employers and published in partnership with the British Chambers of Commerce. Despite a welcome decline in the number of businesses reporting skills shortages (62% down from 73%), skills shortages still remain a prevalent issue across sectors and regions and there is a lack of strategic planning amongst businesses to tackle this gap, with less than one in five (19%) organisations having implemented a written skills plan for their workforce this year.



Organisations have reported a lack of confidence in applying either new AI or green technologies, skills that are integral to business growth and sustainability for UK businesses and the wider economy.

Despite the slight improvement in skills shortages reported this year, it is continuing to have a knock-on effect on staff morale and wellbeing with 68% of employers reporting an increase in their employees' workload. With the lack of future planning, businesses are hindering their ability to strategically address these issues and risk losing staff and adding to their skills shortages – impacting productivity, profitability and efficiency.

The report highlights that on top of the ongoing skills shortage, the majority of businesses (63%) still do not have specific recruitment, training and retention initiatives in place for underrepresented groups, including young people, older workers, those with disabilities and neurodiverse individuals. As a result, organisations may be missing out by not investing in widening their talent pools to mitigate skills shortages and bring people into employment through support and skills development.

There is a commitment to address the skills shortage with investment in learning and development as critical areas of focus for many employers. Over two in five (39%) businesses intend to use mentoring or coaching within the next twelve months, helping to develop skills and create a supportive learning environment. Encouragingly 86% of organisations that currently use apprenticeship programmes are expecting to increase or commit to the same number of learners over the next 12 months.



The Business Barometer yet again recognises the importance of lifelong learning and investing in skills right across the workforce.

As the new UK Government embarks on delivering its policy programme for the next five years, it is critical that there are policies to incentivise the investment by businesses in lifelong learning. As Skills England is set up, local and regional solutions are important to meet skills needs but we must not forget the role of national organisations, such as The Open University, which operates across every single UK parliamentary constituency to reach educational and skills cold spots via flexible distance learning solutions or through partnerships with the FE sector.

A new skills and growth levy could also be a really helpful policy intervention. We see all that time that the apprenticeship levy has offered way for businesses to successfully retain and attract not only new employees, but also established workers looking to enter new phases of their career. At the OU, we have vast experience of enabling career changes through the levy to pursue careers in areas such as policing, nursing and social work – helping to deliver on public sector workforce needs. It's critical that this continues.

Michelle Smyth

Head of Government & External Affairs at The Open University



With the majority of businesses still not implementing specific recruitment, training and retention initiatives for underrepresented groups, coupled with the lack of confidence in skills such as AI and green technologies – it is clear that employers need a strategic, inclusive skills plan to develop talent to fill key skills gaps for business growth and sustainability in the UK.

Organisations will be watching and waiting for initiatives led by the new UK Government and how this impacts them, but whilst we wait for this to unfold, businesses should take action now to invest in existing talent and create inclusive initiatives to develop and attract more diverse groups into the workforce, enabling the growth of individual employees and the organisation itself.

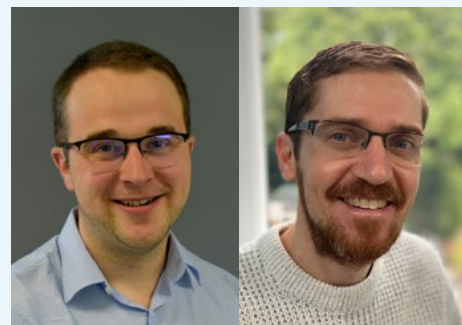
Viren Patel

Director of the Business Development Unit at The Open University

Setting people up to work in growth areas in a rapidly changing labour market

Michael Scott and Luke Bocock, NFER

NFER's [latest research](#) indicates that over a million jobs in 'high-risk' occupations, including administrative, secretarial, retail and hospitality roles, could be lost over the next decade. Workers with low or no qualifications are most likely to work in these occupations. The new government must ensure that existing workers and young people have the qualifications and skills – particularly the Essential Employment Skills (EES) – that are typically demanded to move into growth occupations. This will be key to achieving the mission to 'provide pathways to good prospects for all'.



Michael Scott

Luke Bocock

Essential Employment Skills:

communication; collaboration; problem-solving and decision-making; planning, organising and prioritising; creative thinking; and information literacy.

The labour market is changing

This is because the global economy is changing. [Previous research for *The Skills Imperative 2035*](#) showed that new technologies, coupled with major demographic and environmental changes, will continue to disrupt the labour market, changing the jobs that exist.

The programme's latest report - [Shifting Sands: Anticipating changes in the future labour market and supporting the workers at greatest risk](#) – indicates that over one million jobs could be lost from declining occupations by 2035. As shown in **Figure 1**, 12 million people work in *High-Risk Occupations* which will see the bulk of these job losses. These workers tend to be the lowest paid, least qualified and least well positioned to change careers.

Growth occupations tend to require higher skills and qualifications

Whilst some *Lower Paid Growing Occupations*, such as care work, are anticipated to grow (as shown in **Figure 1**), most of the job growth expected between now and 2035 is anticipated to be in *Better Paid Growing Occupations*, including managerial and professional roles such as teaching and IT. These occupations typically require specific skills and higher-level qualifications.

Many workers at risk of losing their jobs may need to change careers

Given the anticipated job losses in high-risk occupations, many lower-skilled workers may need to change careers to remain in the workforce.

To move into alternative *Lower Paid Growing Occupations*, workers in 'high-risk' occupations may typically need to re-train, but the overall skill levels required in these occupations are similar to the levels required by the *High-Risk Occupations* they currently work in. EES and qualifications gaps may, however, pose bigger obstacles; *Lower Paid Growing Occupations* typically utilise higher levels of EES and have higher average qualification levels. Even more importantly, there is unlikely to be enough new jobs in these occupations to absorb all the workers displaced from 'high-risk' occupations.

The skills and qualification barriers to moving into *Better Paid Growing Occupations* are even bigger. Workers in 'high-risk' occupations do not tend to have the EES or qualifications required by jobs in *Better Paid Growing Occupations*. In the past, the workers that have been able to move out of high risk occupations into these jobs have tended to have higher qualifications.

But it's not all doom and gloom. [Earlier evidence from *The Skills Imperative 2035*](#) suggests many workers in lower-skilled occupations have higher levels of EES than those they use in their current jobs. Workers who can successfully demonstrate they have these skills to prospective employers may find themselves better able to move into growth occupations.

Young people need to be equipped with the skills and qualifications demanded in growth occupations

Whilst the growth in professional jobs will create more opportunities for relatively highly skilled and qualified young people, the decline in 'high-risk' occupations will deprive many lower-skilled, lower-qualified young people of a pathway into work. Given the decline in adult education and training, without action, many of these young people are unlikely to get a 'second chance' to upskill later in life.



[Earlier evidence for *The Skills Imperative 2035*](#) also suggests that EES will be vital across the labour market, particularly in growing service sectors and professional occupations. High levels of these skills may become a condition of entry to the labour market.

Skills policies should target both young people and career changers

Skills England will be focused on meeting the UK's future skills needs. Growing occupations are likely to struggle to access the labour they need unless young people enter the workforce sufficiently skilled and qualified, and more workers in 'high-risk' occupations are given the support they need to change careers.

A collective response is required from across government, employers and the education system to support career changers from 'high risk' occupations. NFER is convening a roundtable in October to identify policy solutions and will publish a recommended set of key actions later in 2024.

The education system must also ensure that pathways to good prospects are available for all by equipping young people with the skills and qualifications to enter *Growing Occupations*. The government's new curriculum and assessment review should no doubt be considering how best to develop young people's skills, including their EES. In 2025, we will publish further research on childhood skills development and how policy makers can sow the seeds to address the future skills imperative.

Figure 1: Higher Risk Occupation, Lower Paid Growing Occupations and Better Paid Growing Occupations (England)



The latest research from [The Skills Imperative 2035](#) highlights that 12 million people work in 'high-risk' occupations which are projected to decline over the next decade. Workers in these occupations who are over 45 and outside London and the South East will be amongst those likely to face the biggest obstacles in getting back into the labour market. It is absolutely vital that workers in declining occupations are given the support they need – particularly to develop their skills and improve their qualifications – so they can embrace opportunities in growth occupations. Supporting more workers in declining occupations to move into growth sectors is essential and suitable solutions must be identified.

Jude Hillary

Principal Investigator of The Skills Imperative 2035 and NFER's Co-Head of UK Policy and Practice

Supporting unemployed workers into renewable energy jobs

The Crown Estate works with the Department of Work and Pensions to boost understanding of the offshore wind sector in East Coast communities

The Crown Estate and Hopscotch Consulting

The offshore wind industry has a vital role to play in helping the UK meet its decarbonisation targets and achieve net zero, yet faces significant skills shortages. The [Offshore Wind Industry Council](#) has highlighted that almost 70,000 additional jobs are required in the sector by 2030. This requires fresh thinking about how to harness a broader pool of talent.

As the manager of the seabed and much of the coastline around England, Wales and Northern Ireland, The Crown Estate (TCE) is committed to supporting the UK's position as a world leader in offshore wind and helping the UK deliver its net zero targets. Well-placed through its established partnerships to deliver a programme in this sector, TCE identified the opportunity for unemployed adults to step into the sector to help tackle skills shortages while also having a positive impact on the social mobility and diversity of the workforce.

In partnership with Hopscotch Consulting, TCE developed a pilot programme to upskill work coaches from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and educate them on the offshore wind sector. The pilot for SkillSet: Offshore Wind took place in East Anglia, a region identified as having high levels of deprivation and lower-than-average levels of skills qualifications, while also being at the heart of the growth of the offshore wind sector. The purpose of the programme is to build knowledge and awareness of the offshore wind industry locally and lay the foundations for people who are out of work to transition into sustainable careers.

Programme development

To develop a programme that would be useful and relevant to work coaches, local job seekers and the industry, Hopscotch and TCE undertook extensive

research over a number of months. This included visits to JobCentres to meet work coaches, surveys and focus groups, a landscape and evidence review, and workshops with major industry employers. This confirmed that DWP work coaches are the perfect people to deliver a place-based model since they are rooted in their communities, and are incredibly passionate about making a difference locally.

The research also identified key challenges the pilot would need to address including:

- The demanding work schedule of the coaches, each managing a caseload of over 180 customers
- Barriers to employment in the region
- Misconceptions around net zero and renewable energy
- The need to find jobs that would be relevant and accessible for the DWP customers without significant amounts of training or specialist knowledge.



A "train-the-trainer" model to upskill the coaches, centred around an in-person workshop and follow-up virtual sessions, was agreed as the best approach to have a lasting impact. The workshop was developed and facilitated by Hopscotch Consulting with bespoke resources and practical activities. It featured talks and Q&As with industry employers, including Orsted, Equinor and RenewableUK, connecting work coaches with real opportunities and employers in their region.

This was followed by online Q&A sessions with more employers and industry experts. Work coaches were also given access to Offshore Wind Learning to complete curated modules of online training related to the sector. The programme was wrapped up with an online celebration event where coaches shared their success to date, including conversations they have had with their customers about obtaining work within offshore wind.

Feedback and evaluation

After the programme, 100% of work coaches said they feel more confident talking about local job opportunities in the sector. It has been reported anecdotally that some coaches have already recommended the sector to their customers. Each work coach is empowered to share key messages with colleagues and local people, enhancing awareness of offshore wind, its critical role in net-zero efforts, and the related employment opportunities. This will be particularly impactful for the towns included in the pilot, many of which are still contending with the

decline of the fishing industry and needed a hopeful new story to tell.

Some key indicators of the success of the pilot include:

- Coaches felt more confident with improved knowledge of jobs, roles and skills within the sector (32% before the training, shifting to 75% after the training).
- Coaches feel more confident talking about job opportunities in the sector (45% strongly agree, 55% agree).

The programme was well-received by industry stakeholders and employers. One industry employer stated the programme was:

"excellent and really enjoyed (working with the coaches) – both sides interested in collaborating. I would like to continue involvement and see it through to employment opportunities."

Conclusion

Both DWP and industry employers are open to the idea of the programme being scaled to train more work coaches and reach other key geographies. The Crown Estate is continuing to work in partnership with Hopscotch Consulting to create a strategy to roll out the SkillSet programme to maximise its reach and impact for communities and net-zero skills throughout England.



Will Apps

Offshore Wind Strategy Director, The Crown Estate

We're excited to kick off this groundbreaking pilot programme, spotlighting the incredible career opportunities in offshore wind across East Anglia and Lincolnshire. As the UK stands at the forefront of offshore wind globally, we face the need to address workforce challenges to ensure the sector remains competitive. With the support of dedicated coaches from the Department for Work and Pensions, this initiative aims to empower local communities, connecting them to the opportunities in offshore wind and driving the UK's clean energy transition forward.

Youth Voice Census

Youth Employment UK

The Youth Voice Census is the most comprehensive collection of youth voice and insight in the UK. It provides a unique understanding of the experiences young people are having in the systems around them, their current emotional and psychological wellbeing, and how they are feeling about their future. Now in its seventh year, the Youth Voice Census provides us with a repository of information for young people in education or training, looking for work, in work or those currently not engaging with these systems. Here we highlight some of the insights around careers information and work experience, skills development and the journey to work. The full [report can be read here](#).

Number of responses: 5,182

(up from 4,276 in 2023).

Age range: 11-30

Survey dates: 8 March – 7 June 2024

The census offers a unique opportunity to understand how young people perceive the barriers they face in transitioning from education to employment and their readiness to enter the workplace. And, like over the previous years, the survey pointedly identifies the limitations and inequalities of current provision.

There has been an ongoing and declining trend in young people's confidence in their employability skills, particularly those still in education. Only 36% of respondents in education felt they understood what employers were looking for. For those currently in education, the survey captured the steepest decline in confidence in their employability skills, with an 8 ppts decrease in confidence for numeracy and digital skills. Only a third of young people (34%), felt that their school supported them to develop the skills they need for their future, particularly for employment. 31% of those out of education think that employers are supportive of hiring them, a reduction from last year and a growing trend, especially for females, those eligible for free school meals and Black, African, Black British and Caribbean respondents. Similarly, LGBTQ+ respondents were less likely to feel confident in their employability skills.

By contrast, for those not in education and who are on their journey to work, 51% are confident they understand the skills employers are looking for, a rise of 6 ppts on last year. The census captured increases in the proportion of young people who feel prepared to write CVs, attend interviews and start employment. These figures now sit at around 57% so there is still much to do, especially for young people who were eligible for free school meals, male respondents, Asian or Asian British respondents and White respondents, who all feel less prepared than their peers.



How important do you think these skills are for work?

	Low Importance or Not Important at all	Neutral	Very Important or Important
Communication	0%	3%	97%
Speaking	1%	7%	92%
Listening	0%	4%	96%
Teamwork	0%	5%	95%
Leadership	6%	23%	71%
Problem solving	1%	6%	93%
Self belief	4%	17%	79%
Resilience	1%	8%	91%
Staying positive	4%	13%	83%
Confidence	2%	13%	85%
Motivation	1%	7%	92%
Self management	1%	7%	92%
Initiative	1%	13%	86%
Organisation	1%	6%	93%
Aiming high	7%	22%	71%
Accountability	2%	8%	90%
Digital skills	2%	15%	83%
Literacy skills	1%	14%	85%
Numeracy skills	3%	20%	77%
Creativity	8%	30%	62%

n= 454 respondents

How confident are you in the following?

	Not very confident or not confident at all	Neutral	Confident or very confident	Confidence difference from 2023
That you have the right skills	11%	21%	68%	↑ 4 pts
That you have relevant work experience	19%	22%	59%	↑ 7 pts
That you have the right qualifications	16%	23%	61%	↑ 1 ppt
That you have a good personal network	27%	24%	49%	↑ 3 pts

n= 455 respondents

Work experience continues to be a pivotal factor in youth employment outcomes. For the seventh consecutive year, young people identified a lack of work experience as their most significant barrier to employment, with 47% of respondents expressing concern. Although there has been a positive shift, with just 36% of young people reporting access, increases were concentrated in secondary schools. Access in 14-16 year olds increased by 7 ppts. While this is an important step forward, for those ageing out of secondary school, the work experience gap widens.

The last few years of the census have highlighted the ongoing anxieties young people face. This year's census indicates a lack of safety, discrimination, and financial concerns were the biggest worries for young people. 43% of young people think anxiety will be one of their biggest barriers to finding work now or in the future, and 44% of young people had experienced the barrier anxiety represents in looking for work. Young people's concerns with their local areas also had major consequences on their capacity to access high quality work. An increasing number of young people report a lack of local job opportunities, 26% in 2024, up from 20% the previous year. The least enjoyable aspect of doing an apprenticeship for respondents was travel, at 32%, up 12 ppt from last year. 49% of young people do not feel safe where they live. Young people also feel less safe travelling to and from where they study and within their learning environment. Overall, just 10% of young people think they will be able access quality work where they live, down 2.4 ppt from 2023, and 55% are confident they will be able to process into a good job.

Cost, access and safety of travel plays a significant role in what extracurricular activities can participate in. Opportunities for enrichment and careers exploration opportunities are down. 13% of young people did not participate in any activity in the last 12 months, and the proportion of respondents identifying extracurricular activities as important has declined. 65% considered them 'very important or important', but this was a 12 ppt drop from 2023. This will be particularly alarming given the importance of these experiences to exercising key and employer-sought communication, teamworking, and leadership skills. There are few opportunities for young people to access arts, music (down 7 ppts), sports (down 6 ppts), and after-school clubs, with only half of young people having access. Marginalised groups are the most disadvantaged, with the biggest inequality in opportunity are for respondents that are: Black, African, Black British

or Caribbean, care experienced, young people with additional needs, and those eligible for free school meals.

Young people are reporting more disruption to their learning and work, up 28 ppts on last year to 83%. This was higher than experienced at the height of the pandemic. This year, the primary causes were ill health and strikes. When work is of good quality, it is a positive experience for young people, especially apprentices. 83% of young people think their working environment is youth friendly, and 70% are happy in their current job role. This is, however, down year on year since 2022. There has been a reduction in work satisfaction this year too, with money and location being factors, in addition to increased workloads, stress, pressure, and growing uncertainty. 3 in 5 young people reported increases in stress and pressure, but just a quarter were offered promotional opportunities. A third of young people do not agree that they are paid fairly, and 84% of respondents identified when joining an organisation, that the employer pays fairly one of the most important qualities they would look for.

Apprentices have raised concerns about the quality of their apprenticeship. 70% of apprentices felt they had made the right career choice by doing an apprenticeship, down 14 ppt from last year's census. Ratings across course content, mentoring, support from employers and support from training providers have all seen a drop. 78% of respondents rated their apprenticeship as 'excellent or good', down by 10 ppts from 2023. 24% of respondents rated their salary as 'very poor or poor'. 10% of apprentices were looking for an additional job alongside their apprenticeship this year, a rise of 8 ppts from last year.



Green jobs and Green skills

Almost 8 in 10 young people (78%) still in education (up to and including those in university) have not heard about green jobs or green skills. This year, young people were 4 ppts less likely to say they have heard about green jobs or green skills than last year (18% compared to 14% this year).

Have you heard about green jobs or green skills

14%

YES

78%

NO

14%

UNSURE

What skills do you think will be required for 'green jobs'?

- "Initiative, teamworking, self-reflection, communication, mathematical, geographic, scientific, analytical and evaluative."
- "Environmental knowledge, passion for the environment, creativity and problem solving."
- "Self-management time keeping and organisation"
- "Dedication, hard working, teamwork and self-belief."
- "Love for the environment."
- "Knowledge on the environment and creativity."

How likely are you to apply for a green job?

47%

VERY UNLIKELY
OR UNLIKELY

40%

NEUTRAL

13%

VERY LIKELY
OR LIKELY



This year, young people are even less likely to apply for a green job than last year, with a 3 ppt decrease from 16% last year to 13% this year. 52% of Asian or Asian British respondents and 47% of White respondents said they were 'very unlikely or unlikely' to apply for a green job, compared to 33% of Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents.

For those out of education there is more awareness of green Jobs with 26% having heard of green jobs and 32% 'very likely or likely' to apply. For this group as age increases, awareness of green jobs and skills also increases. 37% of those aged 26-31+ and 29% of 23-25 year olds have heard about green jobs or green skills, compared to 16% of 20-22 year olds and 10% of 17-19 year olds.



The Youth Voice Census is a powerful reminder of young people's reality, this year's findings are a warning of growing disconnection and diminishing hope. This isn't a reality we can allow to continue.

We are committed to supporting Labour with their missions, and ensuring young people are at the centre of policy change. For the last 7 years we have seen through the Youth Voice Census the decline in young people's confidence, belief in themselves and their readiness for the future. Ensuring Labour delivers real, evidence-based change that can turn the tide for all

young people everywhere. Policy needs to focus on those more marginalised groups who often are the hardest to support, but suffer the most in the labour market.

Lauren Mistry

Deputy CEO, Youth Employment UK

Youth Futures Foundation: Youth Employment 2024 Outlook

Youth Future's Foundation's [annual youth Employment Outlook](#) brings together the latest data and evidence on the youth employment landscape, including young people's own reflections on the barriers and opportunities that exist for them to progress into the world of work. This year's Outlook comes as the most recent figures show that an estimated 872,000 young people are currently NEET (although our NEET rate at 12.5% is slightly lower than the OECD average of 14.3%). The number of young people who are NEET has a significant impact on the economy – reducing it to the Netherlands rate could increase UK GDP by £69bn over the long term. There is significant variation though, with young men and those from certain ethnic minority backgrounds, as well as people from the North East of England most likely to be NEET. The report finds that two of the major issues affecting young people's employment in 2024 are poor mental health and the state of the apprenticeship system.

Youth employment is also a considerable concern for young people, many of whom face significant barriers to entering the world of work and the most commonly cited perceived barrier is a lack of training, skills and work

experience. This is also often the result of mental health as 85% of young people with a mental health condition believe that their condition affects their ability to either find work, or to function in a professional environment. Apprenticeships in particular are seen as helpful, but there are significant barriers to access. The good news is that there is high awareness of many services available to find career, job and training opportunities, most of which are accessed in schools and colleges.

Youth Futures Foundation's recommended policy options include:

- Building a joined up programme of policy interventions that holistically support young people as set out by the Young Person's Guarantee, including extending the support offered by Youth Hubs, and a joint ministerial brief to oversee youth employment policy.
- NEET prevention and better transition support should be prioritised - including trialling intensive support for marginalised young people in education who are at risk of becoming NEET.
- Prioritising support for marginalised young people to access and complete good apprenticeships and internships

We've only just begun: Action to improve young people's mental health, education and employment

Louise Murphy, Resolution Foundation

The transition to adulthood is a tumultuous time: leaving education, entering the labour market, living independent of family and managing one's finances all come with their stresses and strains. But this crucial part of the life course can be especially challenging for young people with mental health problems who are more likely to struggle in the adult world than their healthier peers. Poor mental health can for example, blight young people's experience of education, hamper their finding a job in the first instance, and constrain their ability to flourish in the labour market thereafter. This matters not just for young people's living standards in the here and now: it is well-established that a bumpy start to adulthood can have a 'scarring' effect on one's long-term life chances.

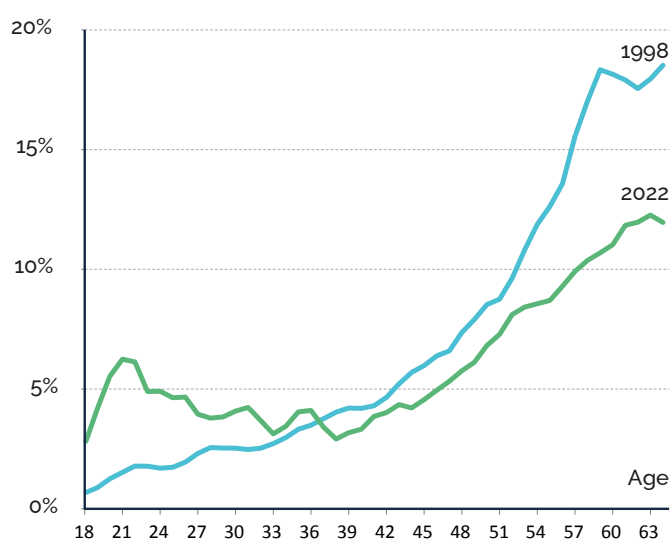
When it comes to young people's mental health, the numbers affected alone should be enough to make policy makers sit up and pay attention. In 2021-2022, more than one-in-three (34%) young people aged 18-24 reported symptoms that indicated they were experiencing a 'common mental disorder' (CMD) such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. That is significantly higher than in 2000, when that figure stood at less than a quarter (24%).

Mental health problems are first and foremost personally distressing, but they also have a detrimental impact on employment outcomes, costing individuals, employers and the state dear. Unsurprisingly, young people with mental health problems are more likely to be out of work than their healthy peers: between 2018-2022, one-in-five (21%) 18-24-year-olds with mental health problems were workless, compared to 13% of those without. No wonder, then, that as the share of young people with struggling with their mental health has risen over the last decade, so too has the number who are out of work due to ill health. In 2013, that figure

stood at 93,000; today, it has more than doubled to 190,000. As a result, in 2023, one-in-twenty (5%) young people (excluding full-time students) were economically inactive due to ill health. Shockingly, those in their early twenties are now more likely to be workless due to ill health than those in their early forties, a radically different picture to that of the past: twenty-five years ago, there was a clear pattern that the older you were, the more likely you were to be not working because of ill health. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: By 2022, people in their early twenties were more likely to be economically inactive due to ill health than those in their early forties

Proportion of the working-age population who are economically inactive due to ill health, by single year of age: UK



Notes: Data presented as three-year averages of each single year of age. Source: RF analysis of ONS, Labour Force Survey.



But poor mental health has employment effects beyond a young person's chance of being in work in the first place. Over the past decade, those with mental health problems have been consistently more likely to be in low-paid work than those without: in 2022, for example, two-in-five 18-24-year-olds with mental health problems (40%) who were in work were in a low-paid job, compared to 35% of their healthier peers.

It is non-graduates with mental health problems who are most disadvantaged in the labour market. Over the period 2018-2022, for example, 17% of graduates with CMDs were workless, compared to 9% of graduates without mental health problems, a gap of 8 percentage points. At the same time, 33% of young non-graduates

with mental health problems were workless, compared to 19% without mental health problems, a much more concerning gap of 14 percentage points. And when we look at the skills levels of those young people who are not working because of health reasons, the picture is striking: four-in-five (79%) 18-24-year-olds who are workless due to ill health only have qualifications at GCSE level or below, compared to a third (34%) of all people in that age group.

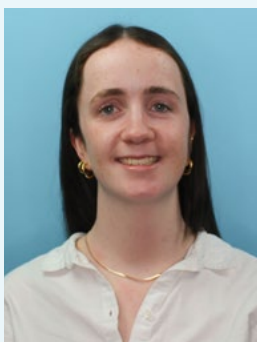
The rising number of children and young people with mental health problems is a serious issue, and one that policy makers have increasingly woken up to in recent years. But with tight public finances a reality for the foreseeable future, it is more important than ever

that policy interventions are targeted on the areas that will make the most difference to the educational and employment outcomes of young people with mental health problems. So, what does the evidence suggest should be top of the priority list for policy makers today?

1. Further education colleges need more investment to help those at the sharpest end of the youth mental health crisis. In 2023, less than half (44%) of children and young people in secondary schools or post-16 settings had access to Mental Health Support Teams (which offer mental health support within educational settings), with this figure especially low (31%) for students in post-16 settings.
2. Policy must ensure meaningful second chances for young people while they are still in compulsory education. Current resit success rates are woeful – last year, only one-quarter of those who resat GCSE English, and one-in-six of those who resat GCSE maths, achieved a pass.

3. Young people need improved advice and opportunities when it comes to non-university pathways. Young people who are not proceeding on to higher education receive less careers advice from their school or college than those who are going to university for example (24% compared with 44% respectively in England in 2022).
4. 'Mental health-aware' managers are a must in sectors that employ large numbers of young people. With a third of young employees in the retail and hospitality sector currently reporting mental health problems, better management practices and mental health training for employers in these sectors should be a priority going forwards.

The full report '[We've only just begun: Action to improve young people's mental health, education and employment](#)', can be read here.



With more than one-in three 18-24-year-olds now experiencing a common mental disorder, urgent action is needed. Alongside work to address the root causes of this epidemic, we need to ensure that young people's future prospects are not blighted by their mental health problems.

Attention on this issue has tended to focus on higher education, but what should most worry us is when poor mental health comes together with poor education outcomes. The economic consequences of poor mental health are starkest for young people who don't go to university, with one-in-three young non-graduates with a common mental disorder currently workless.

To address this mental health crisis, we need better support services in currently underserved colleges, and much better provision for those resitting exams so that everyone has qualifications to build on.

Employers also have a part to play, because the quality of managers in sectors like retail and hospitality is key to more young people with poor mental health staying in the world of work.

Louise Murphy (Louise.Murphy@ResolutionFoundation.org),
Senior Economist at the Resolution Foundation

The creative and cultural sectors in the UK and the role of the education and training system

Kat Emms, Edge Foundation

The creative and cultural sectors in the UK are a significant contributor to the economy, [as we have explored in previous bulletins](#), generating substantial economic output and providing numerous employment opportunities. The education system plays a crucial role supporting the pipeline into these industries. However, action needs to be taken to support and broaden young people's opportunities to partake in a creative arts and technological subjects both within and beyond the curriculum.

Economic impact and job growth

The creative industries in the UK have experienced robust growth over the past decade. In England alone, economic output increased from £64.1 billion in 2010 to £97.4 billion in 2020, marking a 52% uplift (DCMS, 2023). This growth has been accompanied by a significant rise in employment, with over 750,000 additional jobs created between 2011 and 2022. Carey et al., (2024) notes that this represents an employment growth at a rate of more than four times that in the wider economy.

There are ambitious targets across all four nations of the UK to see the creative sectors grow even further. For instance, in England the government-supported Creative Industry Council's dedicated 'Sector Vision' for the creative industries is committed to dedicated careers programmes and ensure the education of creative skills to support the talent pipeline into the industries. The sector's ambition is to grow by £50 billion and generate an extra million jobs by 2030 (DCMS/CIC, 2023). Similarly, in Wales the creative industries are seen as a key priority for growth and have been highlighted recently in their 2023 *Economic Mission: Priorities for a Stronger Economy* (Welsh Government, 2023).

Despite these lofty ambitions, the UK has further to go in supporting a prosperous cultural economy. When compared to other European countries, the UK has one of the lowest levels of government spending on culture, both as a percentage of GDP and per person, coming fourth from the bottom of the 25 European countries in Campaign for the Arts (2024) analysis. The period between 2010 and 2022 saw most European countries reduce their culture spending as a share of GDP, however the UK did so by more than the average across these countries (-0.14 vs -0.08). Furthermore, the UK was already spending less on culture as a share of GDP than the average across these countries at the beginning of the period (0.6% vs 0.82%). Clearly then government investment could help grow these sectors even further, and support even more highly skilled adults to take up jobs in the industry.

In 2022, the government estimated that the creative industries employed 2.4 million people across the UK (House of Lords Library, 2024). Table 1 below shows the breakdown of the jobs within sub sectors of the industry. It shows that IT, software and computer services dominate the industry with just over 1 million employed in this sector (1,035,000 people).

Table 1: Number of people working in each creative industry sub-sector (000s)

Sub-sector	Number of people (000s)
IT, software and computer services	1,035
Music, performing and visual arts	283
Film, TV, radio and photography	280
Advertising and Marketing	241
Publishing	209
Design and designer fashion	139
Architecture	110
Museums, galleries and libraries	96
Crafts	5

(Source: House of Lords, '[Written question: Arts: Employment \(HL587\)](#)', 6 December 2023)

Despite the significant contribution to the economy, median (PAYE) earnings in the Cultural Sector are consistently below the UK median for every sub-sector, with the exception of Film, TV and Music. The earnings data also reveals gross inequalities. On average men are paid 28% more than women in the Cultural Sector. In the Crafts sub-sector, the disparity rises to 70% (Campaign for the Arts, 2024). Furthermore, discrepancies can be seen regionally, with median pay in the North East less than half of that in the North West. Unsurprisingly London showed the highest median earnings for the Cultural Sector and the UK as a whole.

An additional factor to consider when reflecting on employment within the Cultural Sector is the widespread reliance on freelance work. This, coupled with often low remuneration, means many professionals in the field face considerable precarity. Nevertheless, the cultural and creative sectors rely upon a highly skilled workforce, and education and training pathways are crucial to enter the sector.

Education system: support and challenges

Both the passion and skills needed for careers in the creative and cultural sectors must be nurtured early, with primary and secondary education playing a large role in this. D&T and art, craft and design both feed into design careers, as well as a range of other vocations across the creative industries, digital, engineering, architecture, manufacturing and more. Declines in students studying these subjects is likely to constrict the talent pipeline into these industries. Disappointingly entries into creative arts and technical subjects continue to fall, a decline that has been attributed to the introduction of the EBacc and Progress 8 measures in 2016. The EBacc measures schools' performance on GCSE entries and results in a set of traditional academic subjects – English, maths, sciences, a language and either history or geography, meaning schools are disinclined to encourage their pupils on to broader subjects. Thus, since 2010 the share of GCSE entries in arts subjects has declined by 47% (Campaign for the Arts, 2024). This has knock on consequences as students proceed post-16 to A Levels or vocational qualifications. ASCL's (2024) analysis shows that while entries in maths, further maths and sciences have soared at A Level the opposite has been the case with creative arts and technology subjects.

Table 2: Number of A Levels sat in England in creative arts and technology subjects and all subjects, 2011 and 2023

Number of A Levels sat (England). Source: Joint Council for Qualifications	2011	2023	% change
Art & Design	42525	40594	-4.5
Design & Technology	16301	9008	-45
Drama	14646	8340	-43
Media/ Film/ TV studies	31400	21333	-32
Music	8906	4929	-45
Performing Arts	3536	953	-73
All subjects	796860	797352	0.06

Beyond these unsupportive progress measures, there is an acute shortage of specialist teachers in creative subjects, particularly in Design & Technology (D&T). The number of D&T teachers has halved in the last decade, from just under 15,000 in 2009 to less than 6,500 qualified teachers today. Recruitment and retention of D&T teachers are at crisis levels, with only 25% of the recruitment target met each year (Walker, 2023).

Beyond the curriculum, young people's broader engagement with art activities is also declining. DCMS (2020) statistics collected between 2013-14 and 2019-20 showed that a high percentage of 11-15 year olds in England had only engaged with arts activities at school, and not outside of school, in the prior 12 months. Furthermore, reduction in Arts Council funding over the last decade and a half has led to a lack of investment in arts schemes, particularly those aimed at working class children and young people from diverse backgrounds. This has led to claims that the cultural landscape will become less diverse, to one that is 'whiter and posher' (Bakare, 2024)

Beyond the creative and cultural sectors, arts education and engagement has a proven role in contributing to better outcomes for children and young people, developing crucial skills like teamwork, empathy, problem-solving, self-confidence and creativity, which are important skills and competencies across the economy (Tambling and Bacon, 2023).

Further education (FE) and apprenticeships

Despite the sector's growth, enrolments in creative FE courses have been declining across the UK. England saw a reduction of over 220,000 enrolments in creative FE over the past decade. Similar trends are observed in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. Although this aligns with broader trends in FE provision, the falls in participation are greater in creative subjects. Apprenticeship uptake in creative industries remains low, with ICT dominating the apprenticeship landscape, leaving other creative disciplines with minimal representation.

As with the current job trends, creative FE uptake is highly concentrated in urban areas such as London, Glasgow, and Cardiff, with limited provision in rural regions. This spatial concentration may contribute to the uneven development of creative industries across the UK, but could also be a symptom of it.

The sociodemographic profile of learners in creative FE highlights a need for improved diversity. Creative learners tend to be less ethnically and socioeconomically diverse than the wider FE student population. Gender imbalances are also evident, particularly in IT and software courses, which are predominantly male.

Higher education

Higher education plays a crucial role in supplying skills to the creative industries. For example, the 2020 PEC report *For Love or Money* showed that 82% of graduates working in design, 78% in music, performing and visual arts and 75% in architecture hold a creative degree (Bloom, 2020). Beyond the marginalisation of creative and technical subjects in schools, which has damaged the pipeline of these subjects into higher education, creative subjects at universities have been politically targeted as being 'low-value'. Since 2021 in England, the Government has segregated arts subjects from other, 'strategically important' subjects in Higher Education, and their share of this funding was halved (Campaign for the Arts, 2024). Funding pressures that the whole sector is facing means courses with lower student numbers are being cut, completely removing certain arts and humanities provisions from some universities.

Yet this political rhetoric purely compares the salary outcomes of graduates, as GuildHE (2024) point out it 'defines value simply in terms of the economic benefit to the individual rather than to the economy as a whole, or the wider benefits of creative skills to the health, wellbeing and productivity of the nation'. Furthermore they go on to highlight that a very large proportion of creative graduates go on to self-employment. This is defined as running their own business, being a freelancer or having a portfolio career. Just 8% of all graduates in 2020-21 were self-employed compared to 23% of creative graduates and 32% of those creative graduates studying in specialist HEIs. Such outcomes indicate that creative courses provide the necessary skills and confidence to be entrepreneurial. Moreover the British Academy (2022) looked at the skills of, more broadly, SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and the Economy) graduates finding that the skills these graduates develop in such courses are the vital, transferable skills our economy needs, particularly in high-growth sectors. These include adaptability, creativity, problem-solving and independence.

Conclusion

The creative and cultural sector in the UK is a vital part of the economy, with significant potential for further growth. However, the education system's current state presents both opportunities and challenges. Addressing the decline in creative FE enrolments, improving diversity, and tackling teacher shortages are crucial steps towards ensuring that the education system supports the sector's continued success. By fostering a more inclusive and well-supported

educational environment, the UK can better harness the creative potential of its population and sustain the growth of a diverse creative and cultural industry. Creative education needs to be nurtured from and through school to ensure healthy numbers participate in creative courses post-16. Beyond this, creativity and creative thinking can be embedded throughout the curriculum to give students the vital creative and transferable skills they need for the creative and cultural sectors and beyond.



What if we get it right?

At Daydream Believers, we believe that threading creativity through every stage of education, particularly from primary to secondary, is crucial for rebuilding the talent pipeline for the UK's creative and cultural sectors. By fostering problem-solvers and innovators from an early age, we empower young people to tackle real-world challenges.

Our initiative places creativity at the heart of learning. Our Creative Thinking Qualification is key to this mission. Now delivered in over 60 schools across 22 Scottish local authorities, the qualification focuses on real-world problem-solving and hands-on learning. Developed with industry leaders like the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, LEGO, and Edinburgh Napier University, the curriculum includes challenges such as Circular Fashion, Van of Dreams, and Campaign for Kindness.


We also work with younger learners aged 5-14, introducing creative thinking through project-based learning challenges like SeaStory, Marseum, and Solarpunk Island. These activities inspire exploration and innovation, laying the foundation for advanced creative skills.

Our success is driven by collaboration with teachers. Currently, 70% of those delivering the qualification are D&T (Design and Technology) specialists, who play a vital role in keeping creativity alive in classrooms. This partnership has resulted in 93.7% of teachers reporting increased engagement and enthusiasm in their teaching.

What if we get it right? By embedding creativity at the heart of education, we prepare the next generation to drive change and tackle the world's biggest challenges. At Daydream Believers, we are committed to making this vision a reality.

For more information and to hear from our students, watch [this video](#), and visit www.daydreambelievers.co.uk

Helena Good (helena@daydreambelievers.co.uk)
Director of Daydream Believers



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The Great Skills Divide: How learning inequalities risk holding the UK back

Learning and Work Institute

Readers of the bulletin will need no convincing of the importance of learning and skills. They are crucial for life, work and society: helping our economy to grow, living standards to rise, people to be fulfilled, health and wellbeing to improve, and community engagement to increase.

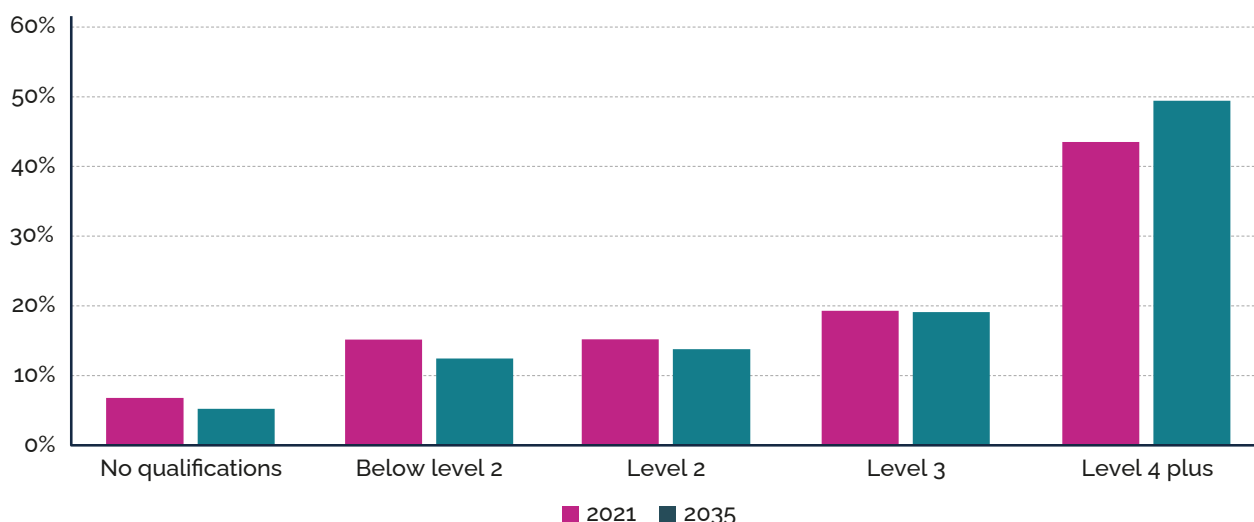
For many of the main challenges of the 21st century, learning and skills will be key. They are an engine of growth and driver of social justice. For that reason, our recent report '[The Great Skills Divide](#)' examined where the UK is headed in relation to participation and investment in skills, and how this compares to other countries. Our analysis reveals that the UK is struggling to keep pace with other countries and is at risk of falling behind on various measures, as a result of declining investment from both employers and the Government. This emphasises the need for the new Government to adopt more ambitious goals.

Projecting the UK's qualification profile

The good news is the UK's qualification profile is improving. Projecting forward qualification levels for the working age population based on trends over the last decade shows that by 2035 almost one in two (49%) will be qualified to a higher education level – compared to 44% in 2021. The results also show a fall in the proportion of people with no qualifications, from 8% to 5%.

However, we project that there will be no real increase in the proportion of qualifications at an intermediate level. This means that by 2035, one third of working-age adults will still only be qualified at or below GCSE or equivalent level.

Figure 1: Highest qualification of 16–64-year-olds in the UK, 2021 and 2035



Source: ONS, L&W analysis

Although comparing qualifications across countries can be challenging, OECD data allows comparisons across high (level 4+ in the UK), medium (levels 2 and 3) and low (below level 2) qualification levels. Projecting OECD country profiles using similar methods to the UK projections shows that the UK is running to stand still internationally: other countries are improving at least as fast and often from a higher base. The UK is therefore on track to be 12th out of 39 OECD countries for low qualifications by 2035 (compared to 13th in 2022 and behind countries including Estonia, Greece, Latvia and Poland); 29th for medium qualifications (unchanged from now); and 10th for high qualifications (down from 6th in 2022).

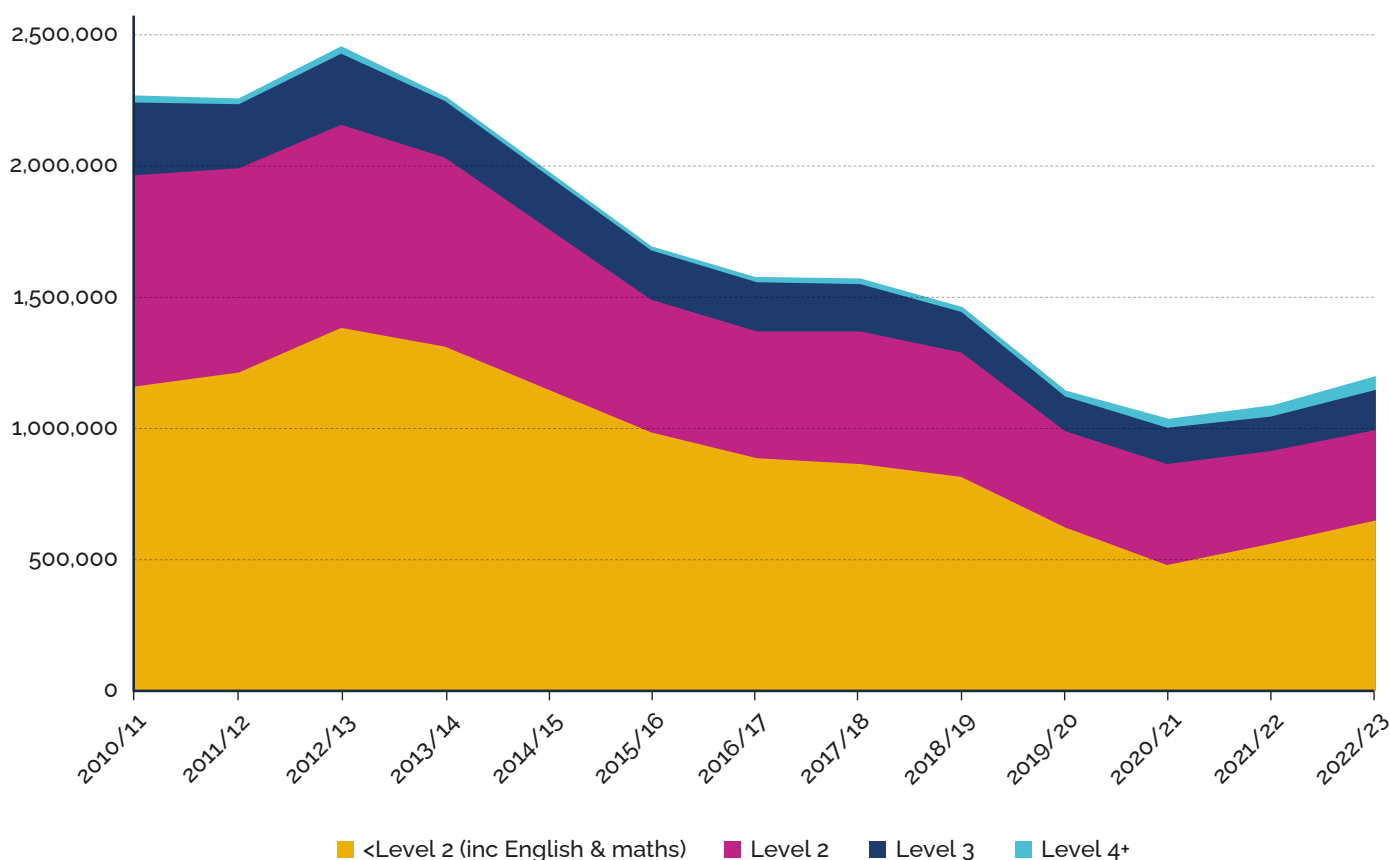
Falling participation and investment

Improvements in the qualifications of the working-age population are a product of the (on average) better qualification profile of young people entering the workforce compared to older people leaving the workforce, as well as qualifications gained by people while in the workforce.

However, analysis of DfE data for England shows that the number of adults improving their qualifications through further and adult education has almost halved since 2010/11; down from 2.26 million to 1.20 million.

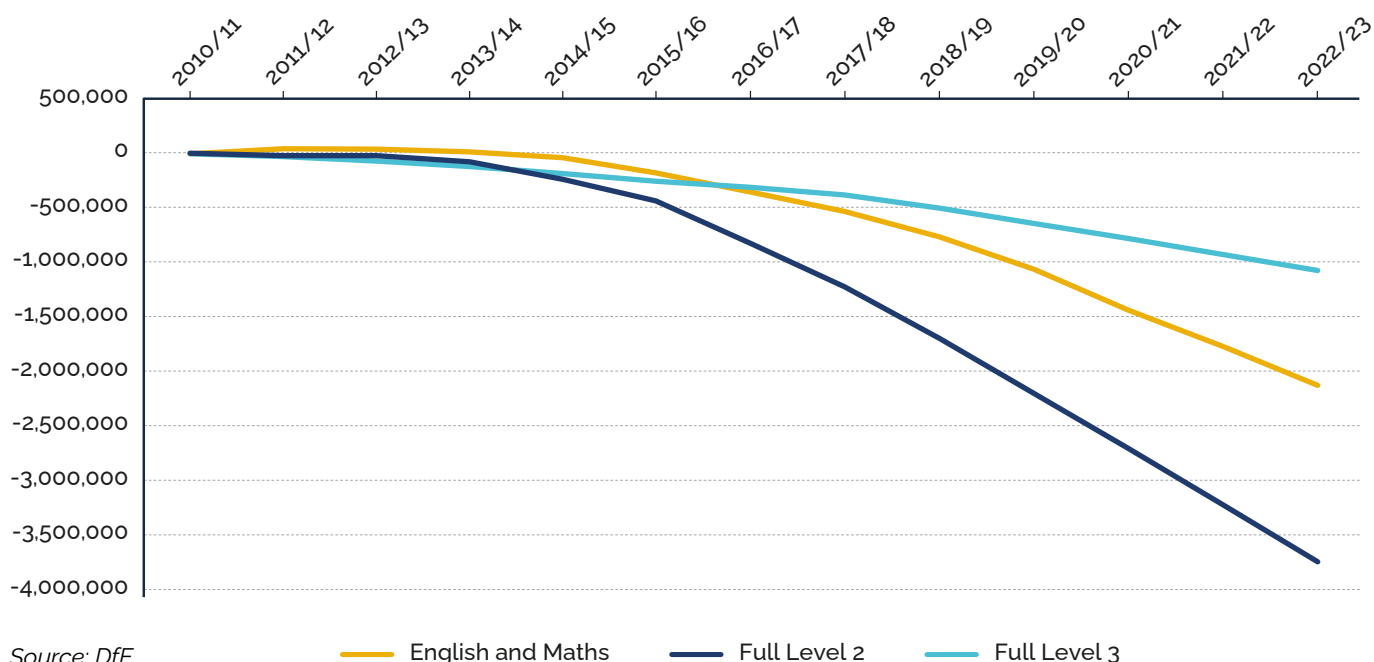
The result is that adults in England have gained almost **seven million fewer qualifications** over the last decade than if attainment had stayed at 2010-11 levels.

Figure 2: Qualification attainment by adults in England by level



Source: DfE

Figure 3: Cumulative change in qualification attainment by adults in England by level since 2010-11



This is a product of cuts in investment in learning by governments and employers and a limiting of the offer and learning routes. The adult skills budget in England has been cut by £1 billion (20%) since 2010 – which taking account of population growth equals a **32% cut in per head investment**. Employers are also investing less, **26% less per employee compared to 2005** – with graduates three time more likely to get training at work than non-graduates.

Our analysis shows that the net result is a slowing in the proportion of adults gaining level 2 and 3 qualifications, even while the proportion gaining level 4 and above qualifications accelerates.

Demand for skills

These findings should be understood in the context of the generally rising skills needs across the economy. Between 2020 and 2035, the biggest number of jobs to be filled due to sectoral change and people retiring will be science, research, engineering and technology professionals (1.9 million); business, media and public service professionals (1.8 million); caring personal service occupations (1.7 million); administrative occupations (1.6 million); and health and social care associate professionals (1.2 million).

Growth is also concentrated more in higher and professional occupations, which is likely to mean

an increased demand for higher level skills. Indeed, projections suggest there will be 3.5 million fewer jobs needing qualifications below A Level or equivalent and 6 million more jobs needing higher education qualifications.

The types of skills demand are also changing. The Skills Imperative 2035 programme, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, argues that transferable essential employment skills like communication, collaboration, problem-solving, organising, planning and prioritising work, creative thinking, and information literacy will be most in demand by 2035 and also support flexibility and career change during longer working lives.

Ambition Skills Programme

This work formed the first part of our Ambition Skills programme, supported by City and Guilds and NOCN. On current trends, the UK risks falling short by 2035: not improving our international skills position when the skills of our people are a core economic asset; not meeting the needs of a changing economy; not fully utilising the skills we have; and not ensuring everyone has sufficient opportunities to learn for life and work.

The remainder of the Ambition Skills programme will focus on exploring how we can change this, setting and delivery a higher skills ambition for the UK.



Corin Egglestone

Deputy Head of Research at Learning and Work Institute

Our analysis projects that by 2035 the UK will continue to lag behind international comparators on many measures of skills, despite ongoing improvements in our qualifications profile. This is a product of cuts in investment in learning by governments and employers and a limiting of learning offers and routes. Yet there are rising skills needs across the economy, with growth concentrated in jobs that require higher level skills. There is an urgent need to set and deliver a higher skills ambition for the UK. This will be the focus of our Ambition Skills programme over the coming months.

Broadening Access to Apprenticeships and Green Jobs:

Spotlight on the Multicultural Apprenticeship Alliance and Nesta

Promoting Social Mobility, Diversity, Inclusion & Equity in Apprenticeships & Skills – Improving Equity and Accessibility of Opportunity for Marginalised Communities.

The Multicultural Apprenticeship and Skills Alliance, established in 2017, has been instrumental in promoting social mobility, diversity, inclusion, and equity within apprenticeships and employability. The alliance is built on three core pillars: **Educate**, **Engage**, and **Elevate** through Advocacy and Policy. It aims to promote a more inclusive environment by educating underrepresented communities, forging meaningful connections, and influencing policy leaders to ensure opportunities are equitable and accessible to all. The goal is to be the catalyst for lasting change, making apprenticeships and career paths more open to individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Tackling Skills Shortages

The UK is grappling with skills shortages, particularly in key sectors such as technology, engineering, construction, and healthcare. With the growing digitalisation of industries and the rise of automation, the demand for both technical and soft skills—like leadership and critical thinking—has surged. The Multicultural Apprenticeship & Skills Alliance aligns its work with the government's **Growth & Skills Strategy**, which emphasises the importance of a well-rounded workforce to drive economic growth. The Alliance's mission is to bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring that underrepresented groups are well-prepared to meet industry demands.

The Alliance takes a multifaceted approach to addressing skills shortages. It collaborates with

businesses, education providers, and government bodies to identify the skills employers need. Through this collaboration, the Alliance ensures that its apprentices and trainees are well-equipped to enter the workforce, contributing to a more diverse talent pipeline capable of meeting future industry demands.

Impact and Current Initiatives

Since our inception, we have seen significant impact across several areas. Through our initiatives, we have increased the participation of individuals from minority backgrounds in apprenticeships. Our efforts have led to higher completion rates for apprenticeships and a greater retention of diverse talent within companies.

One of our current initiatives, Skills for Growth, is aimed at equipping individuals from underrepresented backgrounds with the skills required for emerging industries such as green technology, digital marketing, and cybersecurity. This program provides both apprenticeship and skills development opportunities, ensuring that participants are not only job-ready but also future-ready. Through partnerships with industry leaders, this initiative offers hands-on training and access to real-world work experience, further improving the employability of participants.

Strategic Priorities

Looking ahead, the Alliance aims to expand its reach into more sectors and regions, ensuring that Apprenticeship & Skills programmes and messages reach a broader audience. It plans to work closely with employers to create more inclusive workplaces that welcome diverse talent. Strengthening advocacy efforts is another priority, as the Alliance pushes for policy change that support diversity in skills training and apprenticeships.

The Multicultural Apprenticeship & Skills Alliance was formed to address the challenges faced by underrepresented communities. Through focusing on both apprenticeships and skills development, the Alliance is creating a more inclusive and adaptable workforce, better prepared to face the challenges and opportunities of the future. Its impact to date demonstrates the potential for real, lasting change that is prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future for marginalised communities.



Jagdeep Soor

Executive Director, Multicultural Apprenticeship & Skills Alliance

Gender Disparities and the Path to a Sustainable Workforce

The transition towards a net-zero carbon economy is anticipated to generate significant demand for green jobs and the requisite skills to support them. This emerging market is constrained by notable skills shortages. Nesta, in their report ['Understanding barriers to participation in the green labour market'](#) (2024) has identified that there is a considerable gender gap with women reporting 'lower understanding of, and less interest in, developing 'green skills' compared to men'. This year's Youth Voice Census, for example, found that 'Males were less likely to apply for a green job, with 27% of males are 'very likely or likely' to apply for a green job, compared to 34% of females'. Projections suggest that by 2030, women will occupy only 25% of green jobs,

impacting gender equality and the UK's ability to meet labour demands. This is despite evidence that women act more pro-environmentally and are more concerned about sustainability than men. Nesta argues it is likely women's underrepresentation in 'STEM disciplines', which are often aligned with green jobs, is a factor in this discrepancy in green careers.

In their research, Nesta found understanding of the term 'green jobs' was generally low across both genders, but women consistently showed a lower level of understanding compared to men. This suggests that using broad terms such as 'green jobs' may be less effective for raising awareness. A more targeted approach, referencing specific jobs or industries, could yield better results. Gender differences in job interest were also apparent, with men displaying greater interest in STEM-related green roles such as Renewable Energy Engineer, and women showing stronger interest in non-STEM green jobs, such as Environmental Consultant. Additionally, women were more likely to perceive themselves as less qualified for green jobs, reflecting a broader trend of gender differences in self-perception.

There was a notable gap between participants' expressed interest in green jobs and their actual intentions to pursue them. Bridging this gap may require emphasising the tangible benefits of green careers, such as job security, competitive salaries, and flexibility, alongside the positive social impact these roles can have. Encouraging transitions into green careers might also be facilitated by helping individuals identify roles that align closely with their existing skills and experience. Early engagement with green jobs through education and skills development could ultimately help foster a more equitable and capable green workforce in the future.



‘Thinking Differently’ about the next generation of new entrants to the construction and built environment industry

Construction Youth Trust

At Construction Youth Trust, our mission is to inspire and enable young people to overcome barriers and achieve their full career potential.

As part of our ‘Thinking Differently’ project funded by Wates Family Enterprise Trust, we are examining how the construction and built environment sector attracts, recruits and retains diverse young talent by collecting feedback from young people and working with employers to test different youth-led approaches. The project will help to reimagine how we can tackle the hidden barriers that prevent disadvantaged young people from diverse backgrounds entering and succeeding in the construction and built environment sector.

The construction and built environment sector is one of the largest sectors in the UK employing 9% of the total workforce (3.1 million people). There are a lot of opportunities to progress, relatively lower barriers to entry and high-level professional apprenticeships on offer within the industry which can improve career prospects greatly.

Even though the sector is one of the largest employers in the UK, it is also one of the least diverse, with employees from minority ethnic groups making up just 5.4% of the workforce and women only 11%. Additionally, high-level professional apprenticeship pathways disproportionately benefit privileged young people. With the labour and skills shortage, and economic changes likely to affect the industry, it is as important as ever to ensure employers are taking on new entrants to the industry, especially those from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds. In order to do so, the construction and built environment sector needs to make itself attractive to a more diverse pool of candidates to reach this rising need.

Currently, we have consulted with over 600 young people (and a small number of parents). We sought out young people’s feedback through focus groups, developed pilots from this feedback and evaluated their impact.



'Attract' in practice

Parent/guardian engagement pilot

Young people told us that family pressures are a barrier to reaching their career goals. They said that parents/guardians tend to push the university route on their children over apprenticeships due to a lack of awareness of different career pathways.

As a result, we created a parent/guardian engagement pilot to increase parents/guardians' knowledge of and favourability towards a professional apprenticeship in construction and built environment as a positive option for their child. An important part of this session was involving relatable industry professionals such as apprentice role models who challenge the negative perception of the construction and built environment sector and apprenticeships.

48 parents/guardians attended the sessions overall. We found parents/guardians particularly hard to engage with. The most engaged parents/guardians were influenced by their child to attend rather than being persuaded to attend by the school. There was mixed feedback after the session. Some parents/guardians reported that their understanding of apprenticeships increased.

"The session is really helpful and has made me have a positive interest in construction."

However, other parents/guardians had a more negative reaction to the session ranking their favourability towards construction and built environment careers very low. It was evident that there is still a negative perception of the industry.

Pay and progression pilot

Young people told us resoundingly that they want more upfront information about pay including starting salaries, typical salaries 2, 5, and 10 years into the roles, and the earning potential in the industry by progressing to highly valued and rewarded managerial roles. It was also established that they wanted to know about construction and built environment careers in more depth and the pathways to progress into these roles. Young people emphasised that they do not want to hear upfront pay and progression information just once, but every time they are engaging with recruiting employers.

We then created the pay and progression pilot to disseminate this information with the purpose of improving young people's favourability towards construction and built environment careers and increase confidence in their ability to succeed in the sector.

The majority of young people reported that before the session, they thought that the pay for the construction and built environment industry was low and that it would take a long time to progress and earn promotions.

"My perception was that higher roles in work force were only available to university students. In addition, I thought that the work environment would be harsh and depressing."

"I thought it was low paying and was not a well-respected environment to work in."

After the session, young people reported an improvement in their perception of pay and progression in construction and built environment as it helped give a realistic depiction into what the different pay scales are and what a typical career path looks like during and after an apprenticeship.



‘Recruit’ in practice

Pre-recruitment engagement pilot

Young people voiced the significance of meeting employer volunteers at an earlier stage. Some examples were meet and greet days, volunteering at schools, and having a local presence. They felt it would be particularly valuable to engage with relatable employer volunteers, including apprentices who are only a few steps ahead in their career journey or those from a similar background, as it would help them engage with the industry more and see it as a future career path. They would also welcome more explanations from employers about what they are seeking in prospective apprentices and how various recruitment methods relate to these skills and attributes.

Using this feedback, we developed the pre-recruitment engagement pilot to test whether engaging with recruiting employers prior to the application/recruitment process increases the likelihood of young people securing interviews, assessment centres or job/apprenticeship opportunities. These types of

engagement include employers engaging with groups of prospective apprentices during school sessions, work experience, or mock assessment centre days.

One example of pre-recruitment engagement is Broadgate Future Talent, a collaborative project between Construction Youth Trust, Sir Robert McAlpine, and British Land. 50 young people have met with employers involved in the project over the course of the year at various events including a three-day world of work programme, a networking event with employers and apprentices, and through volunteering at their schools. Consequently, four young people have secured higher level or degree apprenticeship opportunities during the pilot year of the project.

Work experience pilot

Young people voiced that they would like more exposure to the workplace, particularly work experience as it is worthwhile in gaining an insight into the world of work, learning about potential career pathways, and preparing them for the recruitment process. As a result of this, we developed the work experience



pilot which aims to test whether work experience increases the likelihood of young people securing interviews, assessment centres, or job/apprenticeship opportunities.

We have ensured work experience is an integral part of our programme and since the beginning of 2023, we have facilitated work experience placements for 193 young people. We consulted with young people on how we could make work experience more meaningful to them so that it benefits their recruitment chances. They fed back that interactive and hands-on activities (e.g. shadowing, site visits, and creating models) were the most important part of their work experience in helping them experience the workplace. They also reported that multiple work experience placements at the same company would help to build deeper connections and experience different departments. This corresponds to further feedback from employer partners that work experience placements can be an effective recruitment tool for professional apprenticeships.

‘Retain’ in practice

Apprentice network pilot

Young people expressed that starting an apprenticeship is challenging and quite overwhelming after leaving school. It was discussed that employers had high expectations of school leavers, and it needs to be more recognised that they do not have the same skill set as a graduate. They believe line managers for apprentices should be carefully selected and thoroughly trained to understand how to support an apprentice straight out of school and that employers should recognise the construction and built environment industry can feel a less diverse workplace than others so could make

more of an effort to ensure everybody feels welcome by pairing new apprentices with buddies or providing a ‘community’ for apprentices to meet and network.

As a result, we developed and piloted four professional events where Construction Youth Trust alumni, and other young apprentices, could network and support each other. The aim of this pilot is for young people to improve their confidence in their ability to thrive at work.

They voiced that these kinds of professional networking events with fellow apprentices are very helpful in building their confidence and providing them with support. They have also improved their knowledge on progression through presentations/talks from a range of industry leaders.

“Helpful to have others in the industry going through the same path to share views, pros, cons, etc. of the apprenticeship journey”

“It is motivating being around young people my age who are doing similar roles.”

Disseminating findings

We are continuing to analyse the feedback from focus groups with young people as well as pilot findings. The final youth forum focus groups for this project are taking place end of September. We will then compile our findings into a best practice learnings guide which will be shared with industry employers.

If you are interested in reading more in our best practice learnings, then please click the [link](#) to register to receive a copy upon the launch in Spring 2025.



The Thinking Differently project will hugely influence our work going forward and has reaffirmed the importance of youth voice for our programme development.

Ellie Sylvester
Senior Impact Coordinator,
Construction Youth Trust

